

THE LAND QUESTION

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authority. It was, in short, the theory of property which was later to be accepted by all civilized communities. The question of the respective rights of lord and peasant had never, at least within recent centuries, arisen in so acute a form, for, as long as the customary tenants were part of the stock of the manor, it was obviously to the interest of the lord to bind them to the soil. Now all that had been changed, at any rate in the south and midlands, by the expansion of the woollen industry and the devaluation of money. Chevage and merchet had gone; forced labour, if it had not gone, was fast going. The psychology of landowning had been revolutionized, and for two generations the sharp landlord, instead of using his seigneurial right to fine or arrest run-aways from the villein nest, had been hunting for flaws in titles, screwing up admission fines, twisting manorial customs, and, when he dared, turning* copyholds into leases. The official opposition to depopulation, which had begun in 1489 and was to last almost till 1640, infuriated him, as an intolerable interference with the rights of property. In their attacks on the restraints imposed by village custom from below and by the Crown from above, in their illegal defiance of the statutes forbidding depopu-

lation, and in their fierce resistance to the attempts of Wolsey and Somerset to restore the old order, the interests which were making the agrarian revolution were watering the seeds of that individualistic conception of ownership which was to carry all before it after the Civil War. With such a doctrine, since it denied both the existence and the necessity of a moral title, it was not easy for any religion less pliant than that of the eighteenth century to make a truce. Once accepted, it was to silence the preaching of all social duties save that of submission. If property be an unconditional right, emphasis on its obligations is little more than the graceful parade of a flattering, but

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